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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects that cooperative, competitive, and self-evaluative-individualistic learning environments had on subsequent spontaneous self- and other-enhancement behavior of children. One hundred and eighty Caucasians (90 boys and 90 girls) aged 8-10 participated in the study. The pattern of results indicate that enhancement of self at the expense of others is learned in competitive environments; enhancement of self and others is learned in cooperative environments; and enhancement of self with neither enhancement nor abuse of others is learned in a self-evaluative-individualistic learning environment. No sex differences were found. (Author)

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The Impact of Social Norms Inherent in Teacher-Evaluation Practices

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Abstract

This study examines the effects that cooperative, competitive, and self-evaluative-individualistic learning environments had on subsequent spontaneous self- and other-enhancement behavior of children. One hundred and eighty Caucasians (90 boys and 90 girls) aged 8-10 participated in the study. The pattern of results indicate that enhancement of self at the expense of others is learned in competitive environments; enhancement of self and others is learned in cooperative environments; and enhancement of self with neither enhancement nor abuse of others is learned in a self-evaluative-individualistic learning environment. No sex differences were found.

School psychologists are frequently asked to consult about the impact of educational practices on the personal and social development of students participating within a given system. To the extent that social relatedness is important for satisfying school and personal experiences, classroom situations that foster interpersonal support and comfort are valuable and of concern to educators. How one's success and failure is related to the success and failure of others can elicit specific social norms. Evaluation of one's work can be received within one of several interpersonal contexts: competitive, cooperative, or individualistic goal structures (Johnson & Johnson, 1974). A cooperative condition implies that an individual can reach his/her goal if, and only if, the other person in the cooperative condition can reach his/her goal; a competitive condition implies that an individual can reach his/her goal if, and only if, the others in the condition cannot reach their goals; and an individualistic condition implies that an individual can reach his/her goal independent of whether other individuals reach their goals (Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1974). To the extent that social norms are elicited in the interpersonal context of evaluation it is hypothesized that:

1) Children who have experienced the competitive learning environment, compared with children coming from a cooperative or individualistic learning environment, will engage in more self-enhancement at the expense of others by use of social comparisons (e.g., "I've done more than you!") and will actively discourage the achievement or self-enhancement activities of others.
2) Children who have experienced the cooperative learning environment, compared with children coming from a competitive or individualistic learning environment, will more actively verbally encourage the self-enhancement of others.

3) Children from all three learning environments will engage in verbal self-enhancement behavior which does not compare themselves to others.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and eighty Caucasians (90 boys and 90 girls) aged 8-10 from five schools located in a northern California town with a population of 28,000 participated in this study. The children were assigned to learning groups of three children by a stratified (sex and reading ability) random sampling procedure. Then groups were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (cooperative, competitive, or self-evaluative-individualistic) such that proportional numbers of each sex and each ability group were represented in each condition.

Conditions

Cooperative condition. Children worked together as a group to make up stories and were rewarded for the quality of their efforts.

Competitive condition. Children worked independently. Each child wrote his own stories, and only one child (a randomly chosen "winner") was rewarded for the quality of his efforts.

Self-evaluation-individualistic condition. Children worked independently. Each child wrote his own stories, receiving neither praise or criticism, but rather told that the writing project was just for them to learn to write stories by actually writing.

Procedure

After experiencing one of the three goal structures within the context of a writing lesson, the experimenter said to each group that the writing lesson was over and they would now play a game. Following procedures of

Mischel, Coates, and Raskoff (1968), the children were introduced to a task (mazes) structured to be so easy that all children could do it easily and were presented with a pool of rewards which the experimenter did not make contingent on achievement standards. The children were free to complete as many mazes and take as many prize tickets as they wanted.

The experimenter then stepped behind a screen, leaving the children free to talk with one another, and proceeded to record the children's comments. The comments were divided into four categories: self-enhancement statements without reference to others (e.g. I've done 10 mazes now; Look how many I've done); self-enhancement at the expense of others by use of Social Comparisons (e.g., How many have you done now? I've done a lot more than you); other-enhancement by way of encouragement and support (e.g. Hang in there; Keep going; Wow you've done all those!); and discouraging the self-enhancement of others (e.g. Don't take any more; that's enough.). Using these four categories, two independent coders rated the recorded behavior of seven groups of children and agreed on the specific category 96% of the time.

After twenty minutes, the experimenter stopped the children.

Results

Because there was some heterogeneity among the individual group variances, nonparametric analyses were employed. Specifically, two-way Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to test condition and sex effects, and resulting comparisons were then made by the Mann-Whitney U test. One-tailed tests of significance were used in considering hypothesized condition effects; otherwise, two-tailed tests were used.

Devaluing or discouraging the enhancement of others was measured in two ways: 1) self-enhancement at the expense of others by use of social

comparisons; and 2) active discouragement o the achievement or self-enhancement activities of others.

As predicted, there was a significant condition effect for self-enhancement at the expense of others, $\underline{H}$ (2) = 6.62, $\underline{p} < 0.025$. Comparisons by the Mann-Whitney test indicate that children who had experienced the competitive learning environment engaged in more self-enhancement social-comparison behavior at the expense of others than did children coming from a cooperative or self-evaluative-individualistic experience, respectively $\underline{U}$ = 120, $\underline{p} < .01$; $\underline{U}$ = 127.50, $\underline{p} < 0.02$. There were no sex or interaction effects.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, no significant condition effects were found for the measure of active discouragement of the achievement or self-enhancement activities of others. While there was no significant interaction effect, there was a significant sex effect, $\underline{H}$ (2) = 4.95, $\underline{p} < 0.025$. Girls more than boys actively discouraged the achievement or self-enhancement activities of others.

A significant condition effect was found for the dependent measure active encouragement of the enhancement of others, $\underline{H}$ (2) = 5.67, $\underline{p} < 0.05$. Comparisons indicate that children who had experienced the cooperative learning environment actively verbally encouraged the self-enhancement of others more than did children coming from a competitive or self-evaluative-individualistic learning environment, respectively $\underline{U}$ = 138, $\underline{p} < 0.025$; $\underline{U}$ = 140.50, $\underline{p} < 0.025$. There were no sex or interaction effects for this variable.

And, finally, as predicted, children from all three learning environments engaged equally in verbal self-enhancement statements that did not include reference to others; there were no condition, sex, or interaction effects.

Discussion

How persons experience self-enhancement and the enhancement of others reflects the social and personal aspects of the quality of life. The results indicate that, regardless of the interpersonal context of evaluation, children subsequently engaged in self-enhancement processes without reference to others. As Rosenhan, Underwood, and Moore (1974) have documented, self-enhancement need not necessarily be sacrificed at the expense of one's enhancement of others. Regardless of the interpersonal context of evaluation, children in the present study actively engaged in public self-enhancement statements. Subsequent behavior as to the enhancement of others is the attitude that varies with prior experience in evaluation settings.

In the present study, how one related to the enhancement of others clearly depended on the prior interpersonal context of evaluation. Children from the cooperative learning environment, compared with children from a competitive or self-evaluative-individual learning environment, more actively encouraged and supported the self-enhancement of others. The results indicate that children who have experienced working cooperatively, as opposed to competitively or individualistically, will subsequently have reason to feel more accepted and supported by peers in situations that have cues of an achievement situation.

In contrast, children who have experienced competitive learning environments, compared with children who have experienced a cooperative or self-evaluative-individualistic learning environment, more frequently engaged in social-comparison statements that enhanced themselves at the expense of others. Thus, children in the competitive environment learned and generalized the inherent competitive social norms of relatedness, "I win at your expense."

It should be noted, however, that when compared with children in the other conditions, children in the competitive condition did not actively discourage the achievement or self-enhancement activities of others. Children from the competitive environment were not apparently invested in the other doing badly per se. It may take long term exposure to a competitive environment for children to become invested in others doing badly so that the likelihood of themselves doing better than others is optimized. This remains open to empirical investigation.

Children in the self-evaluative-individualistic learning situation apparently learned no marked norm of social relatedness. Told to work on their own and encouraged to evaluate their own work, they were less likely subsequently to relate verbally to their peers. They exhibited neither notable encouragement nor discouragement of others. That is congruent with the formulation of Johnson and Johnson (1975), who argue that under an individual goal structure, student friendship and support systems will be minimized and that loneliness and isolation rather than closeness are experienced under individualistic goal structures. The lack of relatedness to peers under an individualistic goal structure appears to minimize the possibility of positive interpersonal outcomes.

In summary, the pattern of results in this study prov des support to the idea that different norms for interpersonal relatedness are learned in varying contexts of evaluation which carry over into other interpersonal transactions. Enhancement of self at the expense of others is learned in competitive environments; enhancement of self and others is learned in cooperative environments; and enhancement of self with neither enhancement nor abuse of others is learned in a self-evaluative-individualistic learning environment.

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